

Wildlife Diversity News

A Publication of the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program

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Help Keep your Backyard Birds Healthy

Watching birds at the backyard feeder adds much to our enjoyment of nature as it draws our feathered counterparts into close proximity where they can be more easily observed and appreciated. I consider watching birds a privilege, but because we are providing the food that attracts these birds, we have the responsibility of keeping the feeders and feed clean to protect the health of our feathered guests.

This is the time of year our office receives the most calls about sick or dead birds around feeders. With increasing temperature and moisture, conditions are improving for growth of mold, fungus, and bacteria and the consequent spread of infectious diseases. This is especially true around feeders where birds congregate, and their feces and waste seed have been allowed to accumulate.

Three diseases, in particular, affect birds at feeders: Salmonellosis, House Finch Disease (conjunctivitis), and Aspergillosis. Of the three, Salmonellosis is most prevalent. Reports of as many as 30 dead birds at a time are typically associated with salmonella outbreaks. Salmonellosis is primarily transmitted by fecal contamination of food and water by sick birds, but it can also spread by bird-to-bird contact. House Finch

Disease, which mostly affects the eyes of finches, is caused by the bacterium, *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, and it is spread by direct contact or can be picked up at feeders where sick birds have frequented. Aspergillosis is a fungal disease and mold infection that affects the respiratory system of birds (and humans). A bird becomes infected by ingestion or inhalation of mold spores from contaminated foods, especially moldy peanuts or corn.

To keep your birds healthy, keep their feeders and feeding areas clean. Do this by regular removal of old food and by cleaning away waste food and feces beneath feeders. Also, clean and disinfect your feeder and bird bath often. Liquid chlorine household bleach makes a good, cheap disinfectant. Mix one part bleach with nine parts water, which gives a 10 % solution. After a good scrub, rinse your bird feeder and let it dry thoroughly. Store food for birds in a cool area and in rodent-proof and waterproof containers. Discard any food that smells musty, is wet, looks moldy or has fungus growing on it. Contaminated storage containers and scoops that held spoiled food



need to be cleaned with a bleach solution as well.

Maintaining a healthy environment for your backyard birds will not only keep your birds hale and hearty, but observing this health will also add to your viewing pleasure.

- Bruce Ehresman
Avian Ecologist

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Edited by: Jenni Dyar, AmeriCorps

Notes from the Catbird Seat

There's probably no one unaware that Iowa government has been facing a huge financial crisis recently. At DNR, the current fiscal year's budget had to be slashed after it was well underway, and next year's budget likewise must be reduced. A one-time supplemental appropriation by the current legislative session will help get us through some of the hard times, but we're still facing difficulties for wildlife conservation.

Travel has been restricted, so we cannot help with as many wildlife watching events or wildlife education projects around the state. We've delayed replacement of some equipment, reduced reprinting or updating of some publications, and the list could go on.

Nevertheless, some things are looking up. A joint resolution of the Iowa House and Senate passed for a second consecutive session last month, sending the Sustainable Funding for Natural Resources initiative to Iowa's citizens for a

vote in the November 2010 general election. That vote will determine whether or not any future Iowa sales tax increase will dedicate the first 3/8 of 1% to natural resource conservation and be protected by constitutional amendment. If passed, it will result in permanent, stable funding for wildlife and other natural resources, not subject to periodic political whims or state budget crises.

Another particularly bright spot for the Wildlife Diversity Program has been the funding provided by sales of natural resource license plates—those with the goldfinch, eagle or pheasant motifs. Part of the income from those plates funds the Iowa Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) program, and the remainder is dedicated solely to the Wildlife Diversity Program. Because this funding is reserved for special projects, often matched with other agency or partner funds, it is not included in our annual operations budget and hence has

not faced as many spending restrictions during the current budget shortage. That has allowed us to continue protecting new lands for wildlife, conduct special wildlife surveys, and issue small grants to several of our non-DNR conservation partners.

We pledge to continue providing all the support to Iowa's wildlife resources we possibly can, while also abiding by conservative and responsible budgets. With your support and understanding, we *will* get through the present hard times.

--Doug Harr
Wildlife Diversity Program
Coordinator

EagleCam is Online

It's that time of year once again! The Decorah bald eagle nest webcam is up and running. The pair is currently incubating 3 eggs, which are expected to hatch April 8th or so. A still photo is taken every 3 seconds and broadcast to the website, so you can follow the pair as they defend their territory, incubate eggs, and raise and fledge their young.



Go to http://www.raptorresource.org/eagle_dailies/index.html

to check on the eagles and their nest.

Photo by: Raptor Resource
Project

Stephens Forest becomes 13th Bird Conservation Area

Many people consider 13 an unlucky number. Here at the Wildlife Diversity Program, however, we're excited about the number 13 - the 13th state Bird Conservation Area (BCA), that is. The Stephens Forest BCA was officially dedicated on December 11, 2008. Named for prominent educator Dr. T.C. Stephens, the Stephens State Forest complex holds some of the largest tracts of contiguous forest remaining in Iowa. The Stephens Forest BCA contains three of the seven units in the Stephens State Forest complex - Lucas, Whitebreast, and Woodburn - and surrounding public and private lands.

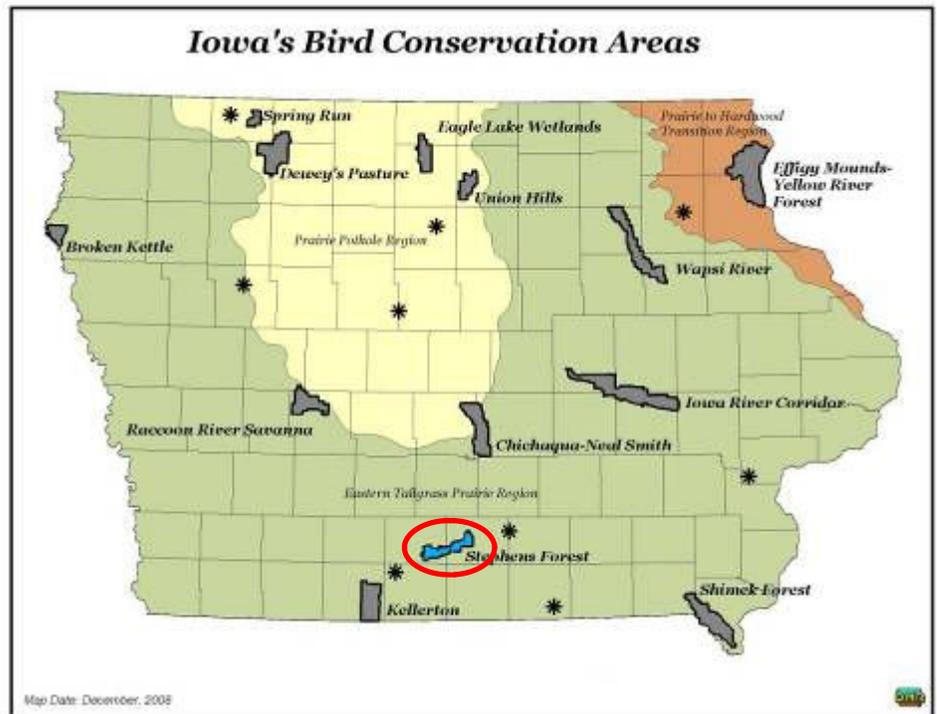
Located in Clarke and Lucas counties in south-central Iowa, the Stephens Forest BCA is made up of 45,680 acres, with 8,192 of those acres in protected public ownership. Private landowner participation in the BCA is completely voluntary and imposes no land use or management restrictions. The Stephens Forest BCA is home to such birds as the red-shouldered hawk, whip-poor-will, wood thrush, and American woodcock, as well as numerous warbler species.

The dedication ceremony took place south of Chariton at the Lucas County Conservation Board Headquarters at Pin Oak Marsh. The Iowa DNR worked with many partners, including the Clarke and Lucas county conservation boards, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Iowa Wild Turkey Federation, and private landowners, to make this BCA possible.

To learn more about Iowa DNR's Bird Conservation Area program, go to:

http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/files/BCA_index.html

- Jenni Dyar, AmeriCorps
Wildlife Diversity Research Assistant



Iowa's Teaming With Wildlife Coalition
Over 230 groups working together to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered.

Iowa DNR a Partner in New International Bird Conservation Program

Many of Iowa's summertime breeding birds migrate to Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) to spend their winter months. Effective conservation of these birds requires that we not only protect their nesting habitats in Iowa, but that suitable wintering habitat is likewise protected. Many LAC nations simply do not have the financial resources to protect enough habitat or to adequately train professional conservationists. Thus, if we hope to see species such as cerulean warblers, grasshopper sparrows and Bell's vireos continue their annual return to Iowa, we must be willing to assist our neighbors in the Western Hemisphere.

To that end, a new program of international conservation cooperation was rolled out at the March 2009 North American Fish & Wildlife Conference. Called "**Southern Wings**," it will feature a cooperative effort by states voluntarily pooling funds for bird conservation projects in the LAC. It will be administered through the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, an organization that represents common interests of most state and federal fish and wildlife conservation agencies in Washington, DC, and across North America.

For decades, several states have participated in a collaborative effort to preserve wetland and waterfowl nesting

habitat in Canada, through a partnership program with Ducks Unlimited (DU). Iowa DNR annually contributes a portion of its state waterfowl hunting stamp revenues to site-specific projects in the great pothole country of Canada's Prairie Provinces. This partnership with DU and other states has resulted in tens of thousands of acres of Canadian wetlands being preserved or restored, helping stabilize continental waterfowl populations.

Southern Wings proposes to follow a similar formula, bringing into collaboration multiple states, the National Audubon Society, American Bird Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited and other non-governmental partners. Each will contribute funds dedicated to projects in the LAC identified as key to the survival of Neotropical migrant birds. It's likely that each state may get to choose from a list of possible projects that will support those bird species migrating between their nesting habitat and a wintering area in the LAC. Iowa DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program has pledged \$5,000 annually, to start, from natural resource license plate sales income. This will be matched with other contributors' funds, thus leveraging a much larger amount to be spent on any particular project. Specific projects will allow for excellent transparency on just how and where our contributed funds

will be used, assuring that the money is not simply lost in government bureaucracy in any partner nation. Each project will be solidly based in avian biology, and partners will receive periodic reports of progress and accomplishments.

Iowa's first contribution will be submitted sometime later this year, and in a future issue of this newsletter we should be able to provide readers with details on whichever project(s) are selected for our partnership. For additional information, visit the Southern Wings page of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies' website,

www.fishwildlife.org/allbird_LAC_projects.html

*--Doug Harr
Wildlife Diversity Program
Coordinator*

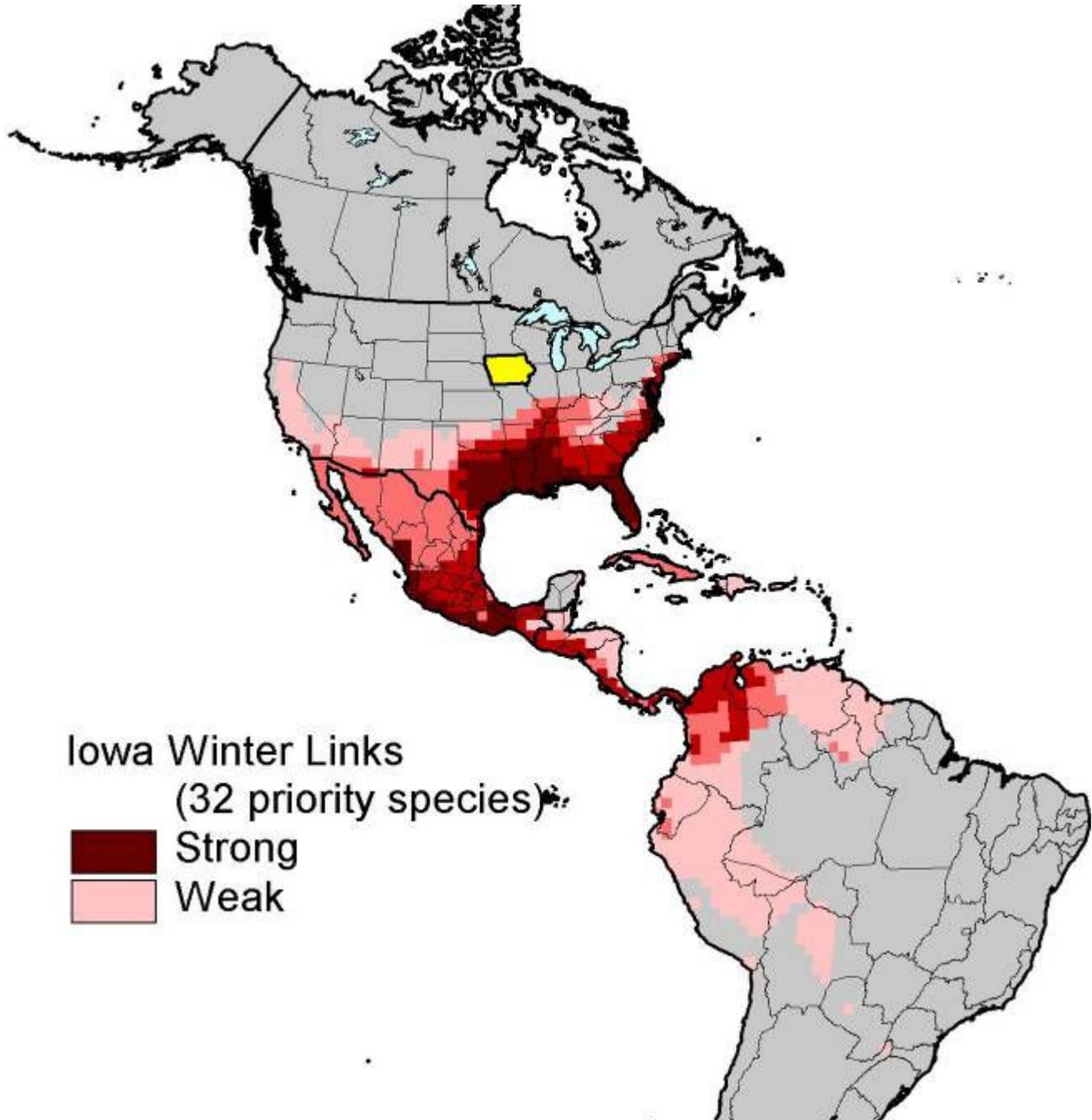


Grasshopper Sparrow
Photo by: Len Blumin



Bell's Vireo
Photo by: US Fish & Wildlife Service

Where 32 Iowa Bird Species of Greatest Conservation Need Spend the Winter



Breeding Bird Atlas Buzz

Well, we are into our second year of the Breeding Bird Atlas, and everyone is getting anxious for warmer weather to stick around for more than just a few days. But even more anticipated among birders is watching the birds come back! It seems that with each week passing, more songs are being added to the chorus of already singing Northern cardinals, red-winged blackbirds, meadowlarks, and American robins. Gone are the quiet days of winter, now filled with migrants making their trips further north and the songs of early nesters. Spring is such a wonderful time of year, and it is the perfect time to start paying extra attention to those potential nesters here in Iowa.

The Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas II began last year in 2008 and will continue until the end of 2012. The main goals of the Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas II are to document nesting birds throughout Iowa to determine current distributions of species and to compare this Atlas' findings to the previous Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas (1985-1990) to see if distributions have changed. From observations recorded by volunteers throughout the state, biologists, land managers, and the public will be able to see how populations are doing and use

the best management practices possible to help prevent declines in species' populations.

The first year of the Breeding Bird Atlas was very successful. We had over 100 volunteers that contributed more than 2000 hours of their time in search of nesting birds throughout the state. Of 791 nine-square-mile blocks, nearly half were visited in the first year. I am extremely proud of all volunteer atlassers thus far and look forward to our second year being just as, if not more successful than the first. Thank you to everyone who participated!

Because it is early in the project, we must remind ourselves that there is still A LOT more to do! In order to complete the project successfully, we need to have at least 200 blocks completed each year until 2012 (requirements of completion include 20 hours of visitation and a thorough search of the block). We are a far reach from this goal and need all of the help we can get! If you know someone who enjoys birds or is interested in helping with this awesome project, please encourage them to get involved and send them my way!

For more information on where blocks

are located and how you can get involved, visit the website <http://bba.iowabirds.org>, or contact me, the BBA Volunteer Coordinator, at the address or phone number below.

Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources
Wildlife Research Station
1436 255th Street
Boone, IA 50036
Office: (515) 432-2823
Cell: (515) 298-3072
bbacoordinator@iowabirds.org

- Nicki Nagl, AmeriCorps
BBA Volunteer Coordinator

Let's do some block-busting! Block-busting is when volunteers get together and focus on atlassing blocks within an area that has received little or no attention so far. For more information on block-busting or to sign up to help, contact Nicki Nagl.

Upcoming Block-busting Events:

Saturday, June 6: Viking Lake State Park & surrounding blocks, Montgomery County

Saturday, June 27: Okoboji & Spirit Lake area blocks, Dickinson County

Saturday, July 18: Backbone State Park & surrounding blocks, Delaware County



Photo by: DeWaine Jackson

Singing males (like this yellow-headed blackbird, left), territoriality, and pairing off (when you can tell the sexes apart like these Eastern bluebirds, above) are some of the things you can start reporting now to the Breeding Bird Atlas.

For more information and to join the effort, go to:

<http://bba.iowabirds.org/>

Peregrines and Ospreys Return to Nest

Reports of peregrine falcon pairs around the state are beginning to come in. Pairs have been observed at most of the sites this spring. Observers are encouraged to look for colored leg bands on the adult falcons. We are trying to confirm the presence of a male, leg band 93T, at the American Republic building in Des Moines (606 6th Ave.). If that is still his territory, he will be the longest-lived peregrine in the Midwest. He has parented 40 young at this site since 1993. If you observe band numbers on any peregrine falcon pairs in Iowa, please report them to the Wildlife Diversity Program at (515) 432-2823 or Pat.Schlarbaum@dnr.iowa.gov. Highlights from last years' 13 territorial pairs can be read in the previous newsletter at:



Photo by: Pennsylvania Dept. of Environmental Protection

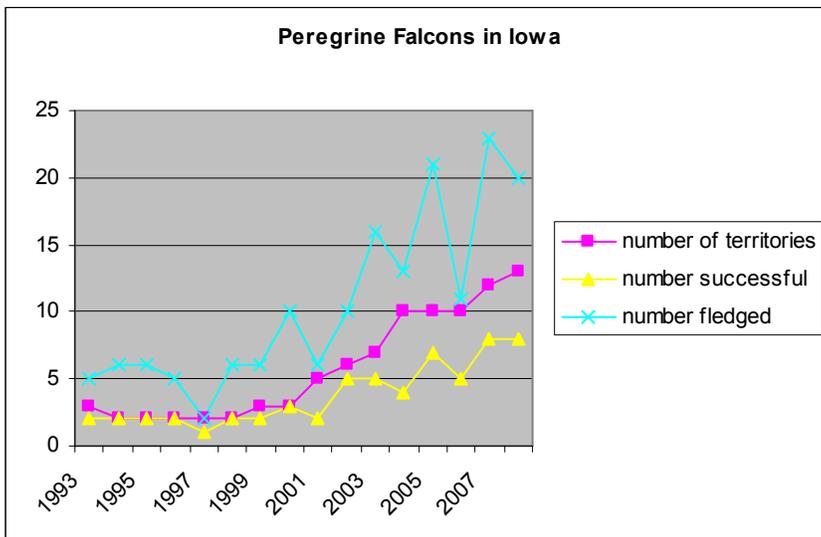
http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/diversity/files/newsletter_08fall.pdf

With the nesting season quickly approaching, nest cameras will soon be broadcasting online. For the downtown Des Moines pair at the American Republic building, you can check on them at

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/diversity/falconcam.html>

Cameras for several other Midwestern nesting pairs can be found at

http://www.raptorresource.org/falcon_cams/index.html



Ospreys are also beginning to return to their territories in Iowa. 2008 was a tough year. There were ten osprey territories with two successful nests producing six young (compared to five successful nests producing 12 young in 2007); however a new nesting pair was discovered just south of Sioux City in Woodbury Co. Three young from the nest at Jester Park were rescued by Joe Boyles and Polk County Conservation Board staff before the nest flooded over in June. All three were taken to Saving Our Avian Resources in Dedham, and two were released at White Rock Conservancy after fledging.

Be sure check our website and the websites of the Linn and Dubuque County Conservation Boards this summer for live osprey nesting webcams. Iowa ospreys have purple or green metal leg bands with letters and numbers to aid in their identification.



Photo by: Carl Kurtz

- Pat Schlarbaum
Wildlife Diversity Technician

Species Spotlight: Blanding's Turtle

Named for William Blanding, the man who discovered them, Blanding's turtles are one of Iowa's larger turtle species. The average adult's shell is 5-10 inches long and domed like a helmet. Most notable is their bright yellow chin and throat, which can be seen when their head is extended. These turtles prefer to live in shallow marshes, ponds and similar wetlands.

Blanding's turtles emerge from hibernation in April. They are most often seen basking on large logs, snags and muskrat lodges. Naturally shy, they are quick to dive under water when disturbed. They may not surface again for up to 30 minutes. These turtles like to eat a variety of animals, but crayfish seem to be their favorite. They will also eat earthworms, slugs, snails, small fish, aquatic insect larvae, tadpoles, succulent plants, and berries. Blanding's turtles are one of the few turtles that can swallow food out of water.

Nesting season begins in early June for Blanding's turtles. Females will travel up to a mile and a half from water until they find a suitable location. They prefer open sandy areas and will usually return

to the same location each year. Females lay about 10 eggs during the late afternoon or after dusk. After covering and smoothing the top of the nest, which may take up to an hour, they head back to the marsh. The eggs hatch after about 60 days, and hatchlings travel the same route as their mother did back to the marsh, often crossing roads to get there. Young turtles reach maturity when they are 15-20 years old, and adults can live up to 70 years.

At least 75% of all eggs laid do not become adult turtles. Animals such as skunks, raccoons, and crows have discovered turtle eggs make a tasty snack. Hatchlings are vulnerable to predation and road mortality while making the trip from the nest to the marsh or wetland. The greatest threats adult turtles face are road mortality and habitat loss. Blanding's turtles are declining in Iowa and are listed as state-threatened. Scattered populations are found throughout much of Iowa, except for the southwestern third of the state.

Like other reptiles and amphibians, Blanding's turtles are important



Photo by: Jeff LeClere

indicators of wetland and water quality. Because most of their life is spent in and around wetlands, they are one of the earlier species to disappear if an area or watershed becomes polluted. On the other hand, they may be locally abundant around good quality wetlands.

If you see a Blanding's turtle, please report your sighting to the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program. Make a note of the exact location and time of day, and call us at (515) 432-2823. Alternately, you can email this information to me at Jennifer.Dyar@dnr.iowa.gov.

- Jenni Dyar, AmeriCorps
Wildlife Diversity Research Assistant



Photo by: Lowell Washburn

WANTED: Prairie Chicken Sightings!

The Iowa DNR really needs your help! In order to ensure this species stays in Iowa we need to know how prairie chickens are distributed in Southern Iowa. Sightings of prairie chickens are possible in Adair, Madison, Adams, Union, Clarke, Taylor, Ringgold, Decatur and Wayne Counties.

If you see any prairie chickens, whether it is on a booming ground or was flushed out of some grass, we would like to hear about it. To learn more about prairie chickens and get tips on identifying them, go to: <http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/diversity/pchicken.html>

**Please report any sightings to the Iowa DNR
Wildlife Diversity Program at (515) 432-2823.**

Please note the day and exact location where the bird was seen.

Last Look



As part of the Iowa DNR Trumpeter Swan Restoration Program, young swans (called cygnets) hatched by captive pairs stay in Iowa until they are around 23 months old. During their first winter, these cygnets are placed in groups ranging in size from 10-25 on aerated ponds around the state.

Events Calendar

Tuesday, April 7: 11 am - noon
Des Moines OWLS Breeding Bird Atlas Talk

Where: Jester Park Lodge, Polk County

Thursday, April 9: 7 pm
Rathbun Bird Club Breeding Bird Atlas Talk

Where: Sharon Bluffs Nature Center, outside Centerville, Appanoose County

Saturday, April 11: Sunrise - 9am
Greater Prairie Chicken Festival

Where: Kellerton Wildlife Viewing Area, Ringgold County

Tuesday, April 14: Time TBA
North Iowa Prairie Audubon Breeding Bird Atlas Talk

Where: TBA

Thursday, May 14: Time TBA
Quad Cities Audubon Breeding Bird Atlas Talk

Where: TBA

Friday, May 29 - Sunday, May 31
Loess Hills Prairie Seminar

Where: Loess Hills Wildlife Area, northeast of Onawa, Monona County

Thursday, Sept. 10: Time TBA
Audubon Society of Omaha Breeding Bird Atlas Talk

Where: TBA

A Publication of the:



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Federal regulations prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex or disability. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Director, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, 502 E. Ninth Ave., Des Moines, IA 50319-0034, or the Equal Opportunity Commission, Washington, DC 20240.